

# KANSAS



Department of Health and Environment

## Health Education Facts

# Rubella

## (German Measles)

Rubella, also known as German measles, is a viral disease characterized by slight fever, rash, and swollen glands. Most cases are mild.

### Who gets rubella?

In unvaccinated populations, rubella is primarily a childhood disease. Where children are well immunized, adolescent and adult infections become more evident. Rubella occurs more frequently in winter and spring.

Rubella is spread by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected individuals. Rubella may be transmitted from seven days before to seven days after a rash onset.

Maintaining high levels of rubella immunization in the community is critical to controlling the spread. Control of the spread of rubella is needed primarily to prevent birth defects caused by congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). Therefore, women of childbearing age should have their immunity determined and receive rubella vaccine if needed. Infected children should not attend school during their infectious period.

### What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is a mild illness which may present few or no symptoms. Symptoms may include a rash, slight fever, joint aches, headache, discomfort, runny nose and reddened eyes. The lymph nodes just behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell causing some soreness and/or pain. The rash, which may be itchy, first appears on the face and progresses from head to foot, lasting about three days. As many as half of all rubella cases occur without a rash.

### How soon do the symptoms appear?

A person may have rubella 12-23 days before showing symptoms; in most cases, symptoms appear within 16-18 days.

### Does past infection with rubella make a person immune?

Yes. Immunity acquired after contracting the disease is usually permanent.

### What is the vaccine for rubella?

Rubella vaccine is given on or after a child's first birthday, and is usually given in combination with measles and mumps vaccine.

### What can be the effect of not being immunized against rubella?

Rubella infection is dangerous because of its ability to damage an unborn baby. Infection of a pregnant woman may result in a miscarriage, stillbirth, or the birth of an infant with abnormalities which may include deafness, cataracts, heart defects, liver and spleen damage, and mental retardation. CRS occurs in up to as many as 85 percent of infants born to women who have had rubella during the first trimester of pregnancy.